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A COMPARISON OF TWO METHODS OF READING SUPERVISION.

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THE ROLES OF A READING CONSULTANT IN TWO SITUATIONS--AS A CATALYST IN A GROUP AND AS A "HELPFUL FRIEND" IN A ONE-TO-ONE SITUATION--WERE COMPARED IN A 1964 STUDY. THIRTY-FIVE FIRST-GRADE CLASSROOMS AND 35 TEACHERS IN 10 SCHOOLS IN WALLINGTON, CONNECTICUT, WERE DIVIDED INTO TWO GROUPS, IN THE FIVE CONTROL SCHOOLS (METHOD 1), CONSULTANT HELP WAS GIVEN AT THE REQUEST OF THE TEACHER OR PRINCIPAL ON A ONE-TO-ONE BASIS. TEACHERS IN THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP (METHOD 2) WERE RELEASED FROM CLASS ONE-HALF DAY TWICE A MONTH FOR A SERIES OF GROUP MEETINGS WITH THE READING CONSULTANT TO DISCUSS PROBLEMS AND EXCHANGE IDEAS. A PUPIL-SERVICE INVENTORY WAS COMPLETED BY EACH PARTICIPATING TEACHER EIGHT TIMES DURING THE 140-DAY STUDY. STUDENT GROWTH WAS TESTED BY A BATTERY OF TESTS INCLUDING THE GATES PRIMARY READING TEST. ALTHOUGH NO SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES WERE FOUND BETWEEN EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUP TEST SCORES, METHOD 2 (EXPERIMENTAL) WAS FAVORED BY TEACHERS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY. TEACHER COMMENTS ABOUT METHOD 2 AND CONSULTANT RECOMMENDATIONS ARE GIVEN. WHILE THE STATISTICAL RESULTS DID NOT FAVOR METHOD 2, THE VALUE OF THE STUDY WAS APPARENT IN IMPROVED TEACHER ATTITUDE. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN "THE READING TEACHER," VOLUME 19, MAY 1966. (LS)

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A Comparison of Two Methods of Reading Supervision

by KATHERINE A. MORRILL

THE ROLE OF THE reading consultant in American education has never been clearly defined. The role of the reading consultant has moved from that of a supervisor to that of a consultant who is a "helpful friend." Meetings, suggestions, and availability seem to encompass the consultant's role, with the individual teacher free to accept or reject the consultant's help as she wishes.

Such independence of action may produce good results, but it leaves an inexperienced teacher too much to her own resources, and the experienced but ineffectual teacher keeps her unhappy status.

The study was planned as a means of spreading the excellent practices observed, to insure the help new teachers require, and to offer suggestions through group interaction to the less successful though experienced teachers. It contrasts the role of the consultant as a catalyst in a group with that of a "helpful friend" in a one-to-one situation.

Over a period of eight years as reading consultant in the Wallingford Public Schools the project director found that the medians in the reading achievement tests varied as much as two full years from one first grade to another. Since the children started with the same degree of readiness, the same materials were used, information for the various types of enrichment was provided uniformly, and the same consultant help was offered, it seemed clear that the difference in achievement lay in the ways in which the individual teacher used the available facilities.

Although teacher personality is a variable that cannot be controlled, it was expected that interested teachers would profit from interaction with each other, that a practice used successfully by one teacher would be quite useful to another, and that the reassurance that other teachers face similar problems would be a source of courage to a discouraged teacher.

Evidence of differences in achievement and the factor of teacher personality led to this investigation, which sought to contrast the typical consultant role of a "helpful friend" on a one-to-one basis with a consultant role designed to foster teacher interaction. It was hoped that this interaction would improve first grade reading achievement by improving the effectiveness of the first grade reading teachers.

The study also hoped to show that a consultant can serve teachers in a group in a limited number of sessions with good results and thus provide some guidance in answer to the questions of how many reading consultants a school system must have.

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Procedure

The entire first grade population in the Wallingford public schools was involved in this study. There were thirty-five classrooms under a like number of teachers in the ten elementary schools. Two groups were established with five schools in each in an attempt to discover the relative effectiveness of two different methods of providing consultant help to the teachers.

All the first grade teachers in the ten schools were exposed to the typical consultant situation, in which guidance and help were provided by the consultant at a single meeting prior to the school year and new teachers were presented with a statement of teaching objectives and an explanation of the materials provided by the schools.

In the control group of five schools, called Method I, the usual consultant help was on a one-to-one basis given at the request of the teacher or the building principal.

The first grade teachers of the other five schools received the same preliminary instruction but were released from their schoolrooms for one-half day twice a month for a series of meetings with the other first grade teachers in their group and the consultant. This group was called Method II, or the experimental group. In this method all questions were brought to the group and no individual help was given on a one-to-one basis. At the meetings the Method II teachers were asked to bring and comment upon methods and materials which they had found useful. Time was allowed to present instructional problems upon which other teachers in the group commented. The sessions were largely sharing sessions, and the energies of the consultant were directed toward improving the sharing. There were materials and supplies for duplicating and constructing successful or promising ideas suggested by one or another of the teachers, so that all participants could develop materials in sufficient quantity for classroom use.

In order that materials alone did not make the difference, the materials developed in the Method II group were made available to the Method I group as a normal consultant function.

Participation in Method I or Method II was based on principal and teacher preference and years of experience insofar as possible.

In addition to the data collected in accordance with plans of the Cooperative Research Center, Wallingford teachers were asked to complete a Pupil Service Inventory eight times during the 140 days of the study, which provided answers to such questions as the number of groups in the class in reading instruction and time spent in practice in reading when not with the teacher. Teachers were asked to show whether or not the group membership was changed during the year and to describe the types of materials used in practice time.

Teachers in Method II were asked to complete an unsigned questionnaire which was distributed at

the last meeting of the group. This questionnaire provided for answers to such questions as the value of the meetings to the particular teacher, the most helpful meetings, whether or not the teachers found the exchange of ideas and the time and material for copying them of appreciable value, and requests for suggestions for improving such a study.

It was hypothesized that changes in teacher attitude would be demonstrated in pupil achievement. To test this hypothesis certain information was gathered about the children in the first grade classes. The preliminary and final data collected on the pupils were those recommended by the Cooperative Research Center. The Gates Primary Reading Test was added as a final test in Wallingford.

Results

All the data were recorded on pupil data cards and analyzed for systematic demographic differences which might have biased the study in favor of either method. No significant results were found. Analyses consisting of Student's test and the chi-square test of independence were performed to determine before and after differences in pupil preparation and achievement.

No significant differences were found in the tests taken as a whole. However, a comparison of the subtests of each of the final tests showed a significant difference in favor of Method I in Paragraph Meaning and Vocabulary on the Stanford Test and a significant difference in favor of Method I in the Word Reading subtest of the Gates Primary Reading Test.

These differences in favor of Method I caused the project director to take a second look at the balance for expected pupil achievement as evidenced by test scores on previous years. It was known that a balance of expected achievement on medians had been made which was slightly in favor of Method I teachers. This gave no concern because of the belief that the exchange of ideas through group interaction would produce more effective teaching. There was an aversion to any possible suggestion of a slant towards the success of Method II; the established balance of teacher preference and experience was necessary.

However, when the average scores made on the Gates Primary Reading Tests by the children in the study were compared with the scores made by other children in the same schools the preceding year, it became evident that pupils with Method I teachers had scored higher in previous years. While there is no assurance that children are equivalent in two succeeding years, a comparison of the readiness scores gave no reason to assume that they were markedly different.

The comparison of the scores on the Gates Primary Reading Test showed that 41 per cent of pupils in Method I tested at 3.0 and above in 1964.

Method II pupils in the same year had only 28 per cent testing at or above 3.0 in 1964.

Method I had only 2 per cent testing below 2.0 on the Gates tests in 1964, while Method II had 10 per cent.

The results of the Gates test in 1965 showed that Method I still had 41 per cent testing at or above 3.0. There were no changes in percentage below 2.0. Method II, on the other hand, had raised the percentage testing at 3.0 or above to 40 per cent in 1965 and had lowered the percentage testing below 2.0 to 3.5 per cent.

One school in Method II which had had a series of new teachers with consistently poor results had 38 per cent at or above 3.0 in 1965 as compared to 13 per cent in 1964. The greatest gain was shown by a school in Method II which had had 20 per cent testing at 3.0 and above in 1964 and had 52 per cent testing at 3.0 and above in 1965. This could not be reported statistically in the study, but it was a boon to the project director, whose faith in the basic beliefs of the study remain unshaken.

The results of the Pupil Service Inventory showed no difference in the amount of time spent on basal reading instruction nor in time spent in instruction other than the basal reader between the two groups.

Some difference was apparent in the number of changes from group to group for reading instruction in favor of Method I, and a comparison of total scores on the final tests was made showing that those pupils of the teachers recorded as making frequent or occasional changes did significantly better on the final tests than those pupils whose teachers indicated no change.

Answers to the questionnaire completed at the last meeting of the group seem to point out very clearly that teachers appreciated released time for meetings; that they gained from exchanging ideas, materials, and suggestions; that they liked the convenience of having materials on hand with which to copy the ideas during the meetings; that new teachers found it helpful to hear how experienced teachers managed their time, organized their classrooms, and used the basal reader teacher's manuals.

The Year Following the Study

While the statistical results did not favor Method II, the value of the study is increasingly apparent in teacher attitude. Each one of the new teachers who was involved in the study and who is still teaching in Wallingford has expressed a feeling of confidence in her ability to teach reading and of satisfaction in having sufficient materials and ideas for providing practice work. They have made statements such as:

"I have been able to help the new teachers in my building because of the study." "I have made materials and given practice work this year that I would not have known about if it were not for having been in the group last year." One teacher who seems to be doing an outstanding job this year said, "I can see why some of the experienced teachers feel that they did not need to participate,

but do listen to what B—— and I say, we are *so* grateful for the study, and of course I don't know that my pupils are really superior this year, but I feel more confident and satisfied with the job I am doing."

Teachers who work together feel a closeness as a group. In meetings held with all the teachers in first grade after the close of the study, the teachers who had participated in Method II were heard to refer to themselves as The Group. They sat together and were much freer in offering suggestions and comments than were the teachers who had followed Method I.

New teachers gained in courage and confidence from their discussion with experienced teachers. Several of the new teachers have told the project director how much better they are teaching this year because they had the advantage of being in the experimental group.

There seems to be a greater rapport between the reading consultant and teachers in Method II than with the teachers in Method I. The new teachers in Method II expect the reading consultant to be interested in any materials and ideas they have developed. For example, one new teacher said, "Look at the way I am using the ideas we had last year. This was particularly useful."

Method II teachers' comments and attitudes seem to indicate that the study as a whole was successful for them and for their pupils. In addition, the reading consultant gained ideas which, while perhaps not new, seem worth recording as additional outcomes:

1. There must be an understanding on the part of every teacher that children need a quiet, purposeful and organized atmosphere in which to work. There must be an established routine.

2. Classrooms must be visited on a periodic basis to implement the use of materials. A personal interest in the success of the teacher is as important as a personal interest in the success of the children.

3. In order to provide proper practice at the right level the teacher must take frequent inventories of progress. New teachers need help in knowing what to inventory.

Conclusion. It would seem that one reading consultant can provide better service to eighteen teachers meeting in a group situation than if she meets them on a one-to-one basis. Whether or not the results in Method I exceeded those in Method II by a small degree or a large degree, the fact remains that Method II schools did better in the school year 1964-1965 than they did in the school year 1963-1964.

Statistics may not lie but they cannot measure morale, rapport, and enthusiasm.

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